DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 285 EC 201 246

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TITLE Social Stereotyping in Children with Learning Disabilities: Myth or Reality?
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 10p.; Poster presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Baltimore, MD, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Friendship; Intergroup Relations; *Interpersonal Competence; Labeling (of Persons); *Learning Disabilities; *Peer Relationship

ABSTRACT

Actual and perceived social relations and teacher ratings of social competence in 20 learning disabled (LD) and 20 nonLD children (mean age 11 years) were investigated. A sociometric group included 200 nonLD children in classrooms attended by both groups. Children completed sociometric and social network questionnaires along with the Perceived Competence Scale. Homeroom teachers completed the Behavior Problem Checklist and the Teacher's Version of the Perceived Competence Scale. Results revealed that LD and nonLD children did not differ in the number of unilateral friendship nominations received, reciprocal nominations, liking ratings received, or social networks. LD children rated themselves lower than nonLD children on cognitive and social competence and general self-esteem. LD children were rated by their teachers as having more behavior problems and lower social competence. The stereotype of LD students as socially rejected was not supported. (Author/CL)

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SOCIAL STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: MYTH OR REALITY?

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ABSTRACT

Children with learning disabilities (LD) have been repeatedly identified as having poor peer relations (e.g., Bryan, 1974). Several studies have found that LD children were not more rejected than normal learning peers. The present study assessed actual and perceived social relations, and teacher ratings of social competence in LD and nonLD children. The sample included two groups of children: an experimental group of 20 LD children and a control group of 20 nonLD children. A sociometric group included 200 nonLD children in classrooms attended by experimental and control groups. Children were administered sociometric and social network questionnaires, and the Perceived Competence Scale (Harter, 1979). The Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1975) and Teacher's Version of the Perceived Competence Scale were administered to homeroom teachers. Results indicated that LD and nonLD children did not differ in the number of unilateral friendship nominations received, reciprocal nominations, liking ratings received, or social networks. LD children rated themselves as lower than nonLD peers on cognitive and social competence and general self-esteem. LD children were rated by their teachers as having more behavior problems and lower social competence. The stereotype of LD children as socially rejected is not supported. Ecological variables, teachers' perceptions of LD students, and implications for intervention are discussed.

Poster presented at the Biennial Meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, April, 1987, Baltimore, MD.

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AIMS

1. To assess actual and perceived social relations of children with and without learning disabilities.
2. To investigate behavioral and ecological determinants of social status among LD and nonLD children.
3. To examine competencies of LD and nonLD children as perceived by themselves and their teachers.

METHOD

Subjects

The sample included two groups of children:

1. An experimental group of 20 LD boys and girls (M age = 11 years 6 months; M IQ = 95.5).
2. A control group of 20 nonLD boys and girls (M age = 11 years 6 months; M IQ = 108.1).

The groups were matched for age, sex, race, SES and homeroom. In addition, a classmate group of 200 fourth (N=18) and fifth (N=182) grade children allowed identification of peer status. All children in the experimental group had been determined to qualify for special educational services by a multidisciplinary team including a school psychologist. The diagnosis was made in accordance with Federal, State and local guidelines for specific learning disabilities.

Procedure

Children were administered the following measures individually so that group administration would not place LD children at a disadvantage due to possible differerences in their verbal comprehension, writing, or verbal ability.

Measures

1. Sociometric questionnaire. Children were asked to name people they know best in school and were allowed to say as many names as they wished. Then they were asked to indicate for each child of the same sex in their grade, whether they like, dislike, feel neutrally, or do not know that child by pointing to a smiling face (☺ = like), a frowning face (☹ = don't like), a neutral face (😐 = neutral), or a neutral face with a question mark beside it (😐? = don't know). If they liked a particular child, they were then asked to indicate how much they liked

that child by pointing to one of five squares increasing in size. The smallest square was labeled, like a little, and the largest square, like very much. Next, children were asked to review the list of same-sex peers a second time, indicating how they think each child may have rated them (i.e., like, dislike, feel neutrally, or don't know) using the same procedure and identical visual rating scales.

2. Social network questionnaire. Children were asked to name people they knew best outside of school. They were also asked to answer additional questions regarding the age and frequency of contact with the nominee and the nature of the relationship.

3. The Behavior Problem Checklist. The Behavior Problem checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1975), a teacher checklist for problem behaviors in the classroom, was completed by homeroom teachers. It includes five subscales: Conduct-problem, personality-problem, inadequacy-immaturity, psychotic behavior, and socialized delinquency.

4. Ecological Variables. Information on amount of time for which the child was mainstreamed per week and total duration of time in a special education program was obtained from school files.

5. Perceived Competence Scale. The scale consists of 28 statements read aloud to children reflecting cognitive, social and physical competence and general self-esteem (Harter, 1979).

6. Teacher's Ratings of Actual Competence. The teacher's version of the Perceived Competence Scale was administered to homeroom teachers.

RESULTS

In order to examine differences between LD and nonLD children's actual social status, four separate MANOVAs with group as independent variable were performed on the following sets of dependent variables: (1) Number of unilateral nominations received, number of unilateral nominations given, number of reciprocal nominations. (2) Number of liking ratings received, number of liking ratings given. (3) Number of disliking ratings received, number of disliking ratings given. None of the overall tests for group differences reached statistical significance. The means for these variables are shown in Table 1.

To assess differences between LD and nonLD children's perceived social status, a MANOVA was performed on the number of matches between each child's actual rating and their estimated peer rating. This analysis revealed no significant group differences.

An ANOVA performed on the total number of individuals in the social network did not reveal any significant group differences. The number in each child's peer and adult network were entered into a MANOVA with group as independent variable. The results of this analysis also did not reach statistical significance. The means are shown in Table 1.

A MANOVA performed on the five dimensions of the BPC revealed no significant group differences. When an ANOVA on the total number of problems by group was performed, LD children were rated by their teachers as having more problems overall than nonLD peers (F (1,31) = 10.35, $p < .01$). The means for these variables are shown in Table 2.

The relationship between social relations and ecological variables was examined through correlational analysis. Children who were mainstreamed for more time during the school day were less disliked by peers ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). When relations between ecological

variables and other determinants of social status were examined, children who were mainstreamed more time during the school day displayed fewer behavior problems as judged by teachers (r = .49, p < .01).

To compare LD and nonLD children's perceptions of their social, cognitive, or physical competence or general self-esteem, these variables were entered into a MANOVA with group as a factor. The analysis yielded a significant overall test of group effect (Wilks Lambda= F (4,35) = 3.98 p < .01). Further univariate analyses revealed a significant group effect for cognitive competence (F (1,39) = 17.20, p <.01), social competence (F (1,39) = 7.06, p <.05) and general self-esteem (F (1,39) = 5.44, p < .05). LD children rated themselves lower on cognitive, social and general scales than nonLD peers. These means are shown in Table 3.

To assess differences between LD and nonLD children on the four dimensions of competence as reported by teachers, the four subscales were entered into a MANOVA with group as a factor. The highly significant MANOVA, Wilks Lambda (F (4,55) = 6.12, p < .001) indicates a significant overall test of group. Univariate analyses further revealed significant main effects for cognitive (F (1,59) = 23.92, p < .001), social (F (1,59) = 14.19, p < .001), physical (F (1,59) = 12.86, p < .001) and general (F (1,59) = 9.94, p < .01) scales, indicating that teachers rated LD children as less competent in all areas, in comparison with nonLD peers. These means are shown in Table 3. Students' and teachers' ratings of competence were highly correlated for cognitive, social, and physical competence (rs = .62, .43, and .49, respectively with p's < .001) but not for general self-esteem (r = .32, p < .05).

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Sociometric and Social Network Variables

	Experimental		Control	
	X	SD	X	SD
Unilateral Nominations received	.35	.58	1.10	1.07
Unilateral Nominations Given	2.65	1.92	3.15	2.32
Reciprocal Nominations	.35	.59	.65	1.03
Unilateral liking ratings received	8.55	4.74	12.35	7.10
Unilateral liking ratings given	10.60	6.41	9.35	5.61
Disliking ratings received	3.85	4.45	1.80	1.47
Disliking ratings given	3.75	5.58	2.85	3.68
Neutral ratings received	4.45	4.44	4.35	2.92
Neutral ratings given	5.10	3.25	6.60	5.03
Unfamiliarity ratings received	4.75	5.56	5.00	4.75
Unfamiliarity ratings given	6.00	6.07	4.75	5.75
Social Network Nominations	3.45	2.26	4.20	2.61
Peer Network	1.85	1.30	2.40	1.70
Adult Network	1.00	1.49	1.00	1.21

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Behavior Problems

	Experimental		Control	
	X	SD	X	SD
Conduct-Problem	2.06	3.33	.25	.58
Personality Problem	2.25	1.69	1.06	1.18
Inadequacy-Immaturity	.63	1.20	.13	.34
Socialized Delinquency	.19	.54	.06	.25
Psychotic Behavior	.19	.40	.13	.34
Total Problems	5.31	4.36	1.63	1.41

TABLE 3

Means for Perceived Competence

	Experimental		Control	
	Child	Teacher	Child	Teacher
Cognitive Competence	2.19	2.18	2.93	3.05
Social Competence	2.54	2.63	3.14	3.16
Physical Competence	2.51	2.43	2.81	2.96
General Self-esteem	2.48	2.71	2.99	3.15

CONCLUSIONS

1. The absence of group differences on sociometric variables suggests that LD children may have minor difficulties in peer relations but are not rejected by peers.
2. Both LD and nonLD children's perceived peer status corresponded closely to their actual status, suggesting that LD children are not deficient in assessing their peers' feelings towards them.
3. LD children, like their nonLD peers, derive psychological support from family, friends and community members in their social network.
4. That LD children were rated by their teachers as having more behavior problems overall than nonLD peers without group differences in social status leads to speculation that teachers may have a negative attitude towards special education students or expect them to exhibit behavior problems.
5. The finding that children who were mainstreamed for more time during the school day were less disliked by peers and displayed fewer behavior problems as judged by their teachers suggests that LD students who are mainstreamed have fewer problems or mainstreaming can have a beneficial effect on LD children's peer relations.
6. Despite social status which is comparable to nonLD peers, LD children rated themselves significantly lower on cognitive and social competence and general self-esteem than nonLD peers. These differences could be attributed to prolonged school failure or teacher attitudes towards LD students.
7. The finding that teachers rated LD children as less competent in all areas in comparison with nonLD peers suggests that more research on teacher's perceptions of LD students is needed.